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AUTHOR	Pellerano, Cristina; Fradd, Sandra H.; Rovira, Lourdes
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ABSTRACT

Coral Way Elementary School (Florida), the nation's oldest 20th-century public bilingual school, is recognized as a model for bilingual education. Its curriculum promotes enrichment and language development while building on the languages students bring to school. As well as a medium for moving students to English proficiency, it is a vehicle for immersing students in a second language experience to prepare them for life in a linguistically diverse world. Students become bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate. All pre-K-5 students are instructed in both English (60 percent of instructional time) and Spanish (40 percent). In English and Spanish components, students receive instruction in reading, language arts, science, and social studies by teachers fully proficient in the designated languages. Mathematics is taught bilingually by the Spanish component teachers. The school promotes self-esteem, respect, and discipline, incorporating the CORE Knowledge Curriculum into a holistic, theme-based program using cooperative learning and problem-solving. Of the 1,376 students, about 432 are identified as limited-English-proficient and attend English-as-a-Second-Language classes. It is a neighborhood school. Parent support is high, and the school addresses community and business language needs. (MSE)

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Cristina Pellerano and Sandra H. Fradd, University of Miami
Lourdes Rovira, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

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Coral Way Elementary School came into being in 1936 as a combination of Spanish Heritage and Art Deco designs. The structure is filled with arches and courtyards that reflect its modern Mediterranean mystique. Today it is revered as an historic site and a shining example of Miami's signature style.

> *Coral Way's academic program is first rate. Its test scores are among the highest in the city, and the school's gifted bilingual program draws parents from all over Dade County.*
>
> -- Claudio Sanchez, Commentator, Bilingual Education III, Morning Edition, National Public Radio Program (www.npr.org), January 7, 1998

In many other ways, Coral Way Elementary reflects Miami's history as well as its present. As the nation's oldest 20th century public bilingual school, Coral Way also represents one of the most successful bilingual schools in the nation. As such, it is a significant example of educational achievement as well as architectural design.

In 1963, Coral Way responded to the educational needs of Cuban children who began arriving in the early 1960s. In becoming a bilingual school, Coral Way offered a welcoming gesture to the cultural and linguistic diversity that has become a trademark of South Florida and of Miami-Dade County Public Schools. In becoming bilingual, Coral Way embraced a curriculum that set it apart from other Florida schools of its time. Today, the school is recognized as a model for bilingual education nationally and internationally. The support the school receives also serves as an indicator of the growing interest in multilingualism in South Florida.

Curriculum

Coral Way's bilingual curriculum promotes enrichment and language development as it builds on the languages students bring to school. The curriculum is more than a set of instructional tools for moving students to English proficiency. It is a vehicle for immersing students in a second language learning experience to better prepare them for life in a linguistically diverse world. As a result, Coral Way students become not only bilingual and bicultural, they also become biliterate. (Biliteracy refers to the ability to read and write as well as converse in two languages.)

> *Coral Way has set a standard -- the only one that matters. It has proven that kids*

Today, Coral Way Elementary continues to make history. As a two-way bilingual school, all students from pre-kindergarten through grade five

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> *can succeed academically in two languages.*
>
> -- Claudio Sanchez, Commentator, NPR, Jan. 7, 1998

are instructed in both English and Spanish. On a daily basis, 60% of the instruction is presented in English, with 40% in Spanish. In both the English and Spanish components, students receive instruction in reading , language arts, science, and social studies by teachers who are fully proficient in the designated languages. Mathematics is taught bilingually by the Spanish component teachers.

Coral Way's mission is to establish an environment that promotes self-esteem, respect, and discipline in the school community and to enhance students' opportunities to become bilingual and biliterate. It is the only school in the nation that incorporates E.D. Hirsh's CORE Knowledge Curriculum into a holistic, bilingual theme-based program. The literature-based instruction interrelates all curriculum areas, infuses a technology-based focus, and incorporates a cooperative learning, problem-solving approach. The bilingual education program has a solid foundation in subject area instruction and the belief that concepts acquired in the students' home languages are transferred into the new languages the students are learning. Innovative instructional strategies focus both on achievement and on students' becoming independent learners. Coral Way continues to make history with the array of instructional services provided, including exceptional student education programs for pre-kindergarten early intervention and a full-time program for gifted students.

The vision of the school is to provide students with opportunities to develop an understanding of the world around them, while encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning. As a result of the intentional environment created at Coral Way, students have a broad perspective on international issues and positive orientations toward cultural diversity.

Students

Of the 1,376 students, pre-kindergarten through grade five, approximately 432 are identified as "limited English proficient" and attend ESOL classes. The student population is Black-non Hispanic 1%, Hispanic 90%, White non-Hispanic 8%, and Asian/Indian/Multiracial 1%. Coral Way does not serve an economically advantaged population. This past year, 64% of the students received free or reduced price lunch (Dade County Public Schools, 1997; Miami-Dade Public Schools, 1998).

"Coral Way Elementary is not a private school or a magnet program. It's a neigborhood school where children of all socio-economic backgrounds are thriving" said lead teacher, Cecilia Langley. "The bilingual program is exemplary because it promotes high achievement for all students." The students at Coral Way score at or above district, state, and national averages on standardized tests. Test scores are particularly high in mathematics.

Parents

Parents of students learning English as a new language comment that they see their children fitting into their new environment with little stress because of the support they receive from their teachers. Learning occurs without barriers because there is no social stigma for children who are not yet proficient in English. Parents are confident that in Coral Way their children are retaining Spanish as they become proficient in English. Because Spanish is reinforced through instruction and social interactions, parents observe their children becoming biliterate.

Parents of students learning Spanish as a new language are also enthusiastic about their children's

growing fluency in two languages. They understand the economic trends in the marketplace that require multlingual personnel and want their sons and daughters to be competitive in the global work force. Parents are also proud that their children are able to comfortably participate in the many South Florida settings where Spanish is used.

Community

Recent developments at the state and local levels highlight the growing recognition of Spanish and other international languages as commercially valued resources for promoting business growth. According to a study sponsored by the Florida Council on International Education (1994), nearly half of the labor force in Florida (approximately 1.3 million employees) require some level of international language preparation in order to meet global needs. Employers who employ personnel that are proficient in world languages also want their employees to be fully English-proficient so they can communicate effectively with the larger public and adapt to life in the United States (Fradd & Boswell, 1996). "When we educate our children to be biliterate, we are contributing to the development of a global work force that fulfills the needs of Miami's growing multinational economy," said Rosa Sugranes, a local Miami business owner and Chairperson of Miami-Dade County Public School's Multilingual Task Force.

Future

The success of Coral Way Elementary School was featured on a week-long National Public Radio broadcast on bilingual education led by educational commentator Claudio Sanchez. During an interview, Lourdes Rovira, Executive Director, Bilingual and Foreign Language Skills Programs in Dade County, stated, "Incorporating bilingual instruction into our curriculum does not require extensive budget increases. A bilingual program that promotes biliteracy can be cost-effective. It is an attainable goal for many schools."

Bilingualism and biliteracy open doors to economic opportunity. Today, a successful educational environment is a place where students have opportunities to receive challenging instruction. Bilingual instruction provides challenges in a safe environment that promotes cultural understanding as it dispels fears of xenophobia. Messages of openness and acceptance benefit all children and are also important messages for society at large.

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